

The 'edge of chaos' in language variation and change: a minimalist perspective

Theresa Biberauer

University of Oxford

In work on emergent systems, the edge of chaos designates a 'progress niche' or 'creativity zone': this is a transition space between order and disorder where we might expect new developments which can then be integrated into an existing system. My purpose in this talk is to demonstrate that a Three Factors-oriented minimalist perspective on syntax, how it is acquired and how it varies and changes over time – particularly also in interactional and contact situations – naturally leads to the expectation that edges will be significant. The empirical component of my talk will focus on developments at the edge of the (ad)nominal domain, notably in different varieties of Afrikaans. These include Differential Object Marking (DOM), affectively oriented diminutive marking, and a previously unregistered sub-clausal past-tense "recycling" phenomenon in the Manenberg variety of Kaaps, spoken on the Cape Peninsula.